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First-Year Experience Faculty Task Force report

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First-Year Experience Faculty Task Force report

Submitted by Donna Saye

4/11/2007

Discussion:

Information/discussion item concerning the First-Year Experience Faculty Task Force report

Rationale:

To provide senators the opportunity to view the report and to comment on it. The report contains an explanation of why the task force was formed, how it operated, and a philosophy statement the Task Force adopted. There are a series of recommendations that fall into three broad categories: 1) curricular changes to inculcate a stronger academic tone on campus; 2) initiatives designed to better shape student expectations for their college experience both before they enroll and in their first weeks on campus; and 3) intervention initiatives to assist students when they struggle academically.

No action will be requested at this time. Because aspects of the report have curricular implications, they will be forwarded to the appropriate Senate committees if and when funding can be secured for the individual projects to go forward.

Members of the Task Force will be in attendance to provide information and hear feedback. A website will be up with the full report no later than April 20, and possibly earlier. The link will be provided when ready.

SEC Response:

This request has been scheduled for the April 24 senate meeting as agenda item 9. The SEC decided to place a limit of 20 minutes on the discussion.

Pat Humphrey, Senate Moderator

Senate Response:

“A presentation on the First-Year Experience Task Force recommendations. The SEC voted to limit discussion on that to 20 minutes. If there are any objections to that SEC limit on discussion length, our Parliamentarian has advised me that one would need to object to that at the beginning of the discussion.”

Presentation of First-Year Experience Task Force Recommendations, Jessica Orvis (COST) for Donna Saye, COST). (Note: the SEC has voted to limit discussion to 20 minutes). In the absence of Godfrey Gibbison, senators allowed Jessica Orvis and Chris Caplinger (First-Year Experience) to address the Senate.

Jessica Orvis (COST) reported on behalf of the First-Year Experience Task Force.

“We’ve been meeting since August of 2006. We were charged by our Provost to take a substantive look at the First-Year Experience, and we came up with a series of recommendations. And let me just kind of talk about the big ones. On a curricular scale, we have talked about taking our current GSU 1210 orientation course, converting it to a 2-hour course that will be mostly an academic seminar, topic chosen by faculty. Sometimes these are called “passion courses,” where you pick a freshman-level subject that really interests you and design a freshman-level course around that topic that would still have components of the orientation course — the GSU 1210 component as sort of a, we see it perhaps as a lab component to the course. We are developing some pilot sections to run in the fall. Another curricular issue involves transforming the IDS 2210 to a new course called “The Global Citizen Course.” It’s designed to be more interdisciplinary and topic oriented as well. Let me just say that all of the recommendations that we have come up with are designed to raise the academic tone on campus.

That’s kind of been our theme through all of this, and we’ve been hitting that component several times. Also we want to communicate academic expectations at the college level compared to the high school level. And along this level, we are developing a brochure to send to students at home before they come to campus, and then we are developing some time during Welcome Week to devote to academics. As a committee, we’re interested in having more time for that, and part of what we’re developing is something called “conversations with professors,” which is modeled on a similar program at James Madison University.

And we would take all of our incoming students, divide them up into small groups, and talk to them about their role as learner and our role as faculty, and how all of that can fit together. We already have about 40-45 faculty who have signed up to help us with that, and if you haven't signed up, we can arrange for that before you leave today. We need some more; we want to keep these groups kind of small. We're excited about that. We also have looked at intervention. We are talking about limiting the numbers of withdrawals that a student can receive, and we're looking at the numbers of hours rather than numbers of courses.

And 14 as a lifetime limit for withdrawals for students at Georgia Southern, except, of course, for emergencies and medical withdrawals, the military, that kind of thing. We also were interested in the model of intrusive advising. If you've heard of that, that's a, it sounds horrible, but it's a model of advising where we talk to the students more about their support structure and what they need to be successful here at Georgia Southern. The new COST Advising Center is modeled on intrusive advising, and I know that CLASS is using intrusive advising as well, and we would like to encourage a larger footprint for intrusive advising on our campus. That's most of it. We have a lot of information set up on a web site and I encourage you to go look at that."

Patricia Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator: Godfrey Gibbison had arrived. She asked if he would care to add anything in terms of some of the recommendations.

Godfrey Gibbison (COBA): "One of the things that I wanted to emphasize was making a case for the core. And for people who teach core classes, in particular, a case can be made for the core in the sense of the most cynical student, who might consider the core just a way for the college to 'delay my progress and suck two more years of cash out of me.' If we never really say to them, here's why this stuff is important, and sometimes there's not much obvious connection between a core course and what happens later on in your program... And so, when you walk into a core class, ECON 2105, History, or something like that, you sort of have to begin to start a semester by saying, 'Here's why we think this course fits into a liberal arts curriculum,' or 'why we think this should be a fundamental, integral part of your college program,' rather than just saying 'Welcome to History, now let's get down to business.' Because it doesn't really help the student very much to understand why they're there, and they really leave with a sort of cynical attitude about 'why I was forced to take this class that has contributed nothing to my understanding of anything at all.'"

Mark Welford (COST) had a question regarding going from one to two hours and funding. Would the recommendation be that if you have now a two-hour course that it

would be taught within the department, so it would become part of the standard faculty workload? Or would it still be an overload, and you would get appropriately paid by the university, in other words, double what you are getting for the one hour? Godfrey Gibbison (COBA) reported that, at this point, the two-hour course is an overload, and faculty are going to get compensated in much the same way that they have been compensated for GSU 1210.

Mark Welford (COST): “You mean you would get just the same amount for teaching a two hour that you would for a one hour, or are you going to increase the compensation?” Godfrey Gibbison (COBA): “No, you would get two times. It is envisioned now as two times at rate. Although I think there might be some people who are teaching this as a, if somebody’s teaching the two-hour seminar and 1210 together, that might be a part of that person’s, that could be a part of that person’s schedule, just the two hour course and seminar together. And then some of us are teaching this two-hour seminar as an overload and getting compensated at two times the rate of 1210.”

Jessica Orvis (COST) added that task force members think that it’s critical that it can ultimately count in load. They would like for faculty to have the option to either count it in load or to get paid for it, or to use the current model. Chris Caplinger (First-Year Experience): “And that’s what the proposal is. One of the, this has been vetted by Deans’ Council and later by the President’s Cabinet, and one of the observations was we need to take a much closer look at the fiscal implications....But the proposal was to allow faculty an option — working in concert of course with department chairs to make the course release work.”

Candy Schille (CLASS) had two questions: 1) Are our efforts at these sorts of classes being pursued system wide? Or are we trying harder to get people to recognize that this is a university as opposed to a high school? 2) If not, isn’t the sort of drive towards standardization in the core going to have some impact on your designs and plans here? Godfrey Gibbison (COBA) answered that this effort is not system wide. The task force spent a lot of time looking at some very successful places in terms of retention, progression, graduation, and so forth. James Madison was one such institution. He added that this initiative is probably going to distinguish us, quite frankly, from other schools within the system. He asked Schille to repeat her second question. Candy Schille (CLASS): “My second question was just if the task force was kicking around the way that the move towards standardization of the core will impact all of your plans, and then I have one little follow up, if I may, on what you just said. Has student

success, however that's defined, been correlated with the existence of the kinds of courses that we're offering, which aren't offered everywhere?"

Godfrey Gibbison (COBA) responded that task force members have reviewed first-year experience literature related to this initiative. Institutions studied have "phenomenal" retention and graduation rates. "Now the question about the core — I think, our understanding was that there is some room for flexibility in the core for different institutions to add ... institution-specific content within that core, as long as we keep the structure....We worried a little bit about whether we had to extend 125 hours to graduation, and I don't quite remember how we settled that issue, but I remember us worrying quite a bit about how that would play out to the 125 hours."

Bruce Grube (President) added that, during this academic year, he has been chairing a system-wide task force on the improvement of retention and graduation rates. The report of that task force is very close to being finished and will be reported to the University System. Without question, he would think that a first-year experience requirement for all campuses will be in that, but that there'll be a lot of flexibility for different kinds of institutions to decide what that means for their students.

Pat Walker (CLASS) had a question on the intrusive advising. She wondered how the students having problems would be identified. Would that come through the Registrar's Office? From the students themselves? From the advisor? Is the advisor going to be expected to watch out for the students?

Jessica Orvis (COST): "I think intrusive advising starts really with all students. And the models that I've seen working there are meetings with students early in the semester where they try to identify problem areas. Of course, this is also where things like mid-term grade reports kind of dovetail. And one of the things we have been talking about is the fact that mid-term grade reports don't really seem to be working. We need to do something to try to modify that and make it work in with the system of intrusive advising, so that these intervention techniques will involve an intrusive advisor. I don't know if that answers your question much."

Pat Walker (CLASS): "So are you saying that then it would be up to the advisor to be watching out? They talk about having the intrusive advising being able to address problems that students are having, and especially students that have problems to be able to help them to cope with those problems and find structures that will give them answers. So is it up to the advisor, you're saying, to watch out, and to identify their advisees that are having more problems?" Jessica Orvis (COST): "Well, the intrusive

advisor helps to connect students to resources. We have a lot of available campus resources, but they're sort of spread out, and an intrusive advisor actually would have people from these different campus resources have hours in their intrusive advising center. That's how the one [in] COST is working, and that creates a greater connection, so that when students have trouble with their support structure somewhere the intrusive advisor can identify the professional to help them with that, and set them up right away." Godfrey Gibbison (COBA): "Let's say you're doing mid-term grade reports or in an ideal world, for example, after the first month of class, an advisor could go to WINGS and simply type in a message that says Michael has missed six out of nine classes, and that would be a message that would go directly to Michael's advisor, or to the advising center under which Michael falls, so that when you do the mid-term grade reports, you would enter an "s" for the student and also be able to put in a note that goes along with that "s" for the student....You might go in and put a "u" for the student, but you might also be able to put in a quick message that would go out to the advisor, so that when the advisor meets with the student, they could discuss, 'I notice you have a u here, but I also notice that your instructor has a note that says, you have missed so many classes, and so let's sort of try to figure out what exactly is happening there.'" Members of the task force hope that, before students withdraw from classes, there is some discussion with their advisor and/or their faculty member. And one of the reasons that they want to involve the faculty member, the person who was actually teaching that student that semester, is as an advisor. If you go to an advisor in the Business School about a problem with your Biology class, the advisor might just say, "Well, okay, you probably should drop the class." But your Biology professor might be able to say, "You know, you're not doing as badly as you think," and so might be able to have a full discussion of what you need to do, how you might need to improve.

Chris Caplinger (First-Year Experience): In addition to mid-term grades, the proposal is to provide a little bit more information about attendance, an indication of whether attendance is a factor or if missing assignments is a factor in the reason for the student's poor performance in a class. The proposal is to get some of this online as early as next spring.

Mary Marwitz (CLASS) stated that, if we want to emphasize this university as a place of academic activity, to reassure students in this early academic conversation that they can be assured of an environment that promotes academic study, and to give them confidence that they are coming to a place where we take that seriously, there should be more instruction and information about alcohol use as part of that early curriculum. Chris Caplinger (First-Year Experience) stated that the task force did not directly address alcohol in any of its specific recommendations. He mentioned that other groups

on campus are doing that: Health Services is working in conjunction with Health and Kinesiology in regard to the Health 1520 class that they really want all first-year students to take; there was also some discussion of alcohol in the context of the recommendation to defer Greek Rush to the second semester. Patricia Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator announced that senators had been discussing the report for 20 minutes. She asked if Caplinger would like to take 10 or 15 seconds to “wind up.” Chris Caplinger (FYE) reminded senators that all of the entire report is on the web. There is a series of recommendations and also position papers supporting several of those recommendations. There is also a place for comments. There is also a place online to sign up for the “Conversations with Professors” program. Clara Krug (CLASS) asked about the role of the Senate in this program. Patricia Humphrey (COST) Senate Moderator responded that this had been an information and presentation session.

Attachment: [First Year Experience Task Force](#) (link no longer works)

<http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/fye/>